

U.S.-MEXICO BORDER ROUNDTABLE MEETING—GROUP 1
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
March 13, 2001

During Spring 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) El Paso Border Office, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) hosted a series of six roundtable discussions in Texas and New Mexico to solicit input from border communities regarding how binational border environmental issues should be addressed. Meetings were held in Laredo, Edinburg, Brownsville, and El Paso, Texas; and Las Cruces and Deming, New Mexico during March 2001. EPA and its Mexican counterpart, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT), are currently working with the ten border states and U.S. tribes on a draft framework for the next border program based on the ideas and recommendations emerging from the roundtable discussions and other events. The following summarizes the roundtable session held in El Paso, Texas on March 13, 2001.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The U.S.-Mexico Border Roundtable Meeting was facilitated by Mr. Darrin Swartz-Larson, Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 El Paso Border Office, Ms. Diana Borja, Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) Border Affairs, and Ms. Beatriz Vera, Mascareñas Foundation. The purpose of the Border Roundtable Meeting is to involve local stakeholders in the development of the new border program to be implemented in the year 2002. This approach to the program development process will foster the generation of ideas, suggestions, and comments of local community stakeholders, which will result in the creation of a plan effective in dealing with their unique environmental issues.

Mr. Swartz-Larson, EPA, made a presentation on the current Border XXI Program and plans for development of the new border program plan. Ms. Vera facilitated a group discussion designed to foster input from local community stakeholders regarding the new border program.

PRESENTATION ON THE STATUS OF THE BORDER XXI PROGRAM

Overview and Background of the U.S.-Mexico Border XXI Program

- Binational program initiated in 1996
- Legal Foundation: La Paz Agreement of 1983
- Border XXI Program implemented through a voluntary, coordinating mechanism
 - < The program is a strategy, a framework, a forum
 - < The program does not create any new laws or rights

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- EPA and SEMARNAT (formerly SEMARNAP—*Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca*) are the lead agencies. Other participants include:

< Other Federal agencies:

Department of Health and Human Services (U.S.)
Secretariat of Health (Mexico)
Department of Interior (U.S.)
International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)

< State and tribal partners

< Local and community stakeholders

Mission of the New Border XXI Program

- To work cooperatively toward sustainable development—meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs—through (1) the protection of human health and the environment and (2) proper management of natural resources.

Strategies of the New Border XXI Program

- Ensuring public involvement
- Building local capacity and decentralizing environmental management
- Ensuring interagency cooperation

New Border XXI Program Workgroups

- Air Workgroup
- Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Workgroup
- Cooperative Enforcement and Compliance Workgroup
- Environmental Health Workgroup
- Environmental Information Resources Workgroup

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- Hazardous and Solid Waste Workgroup
- Natural Resources Workgroup
- Pollution Prevention Workgroup
- Water Workgroup

Road to New Border XXI Program Plan

- ***Stakeholder involvement.*** The involvement of stakeholders is the primary goal for the development of the new Border XXI Program. Stakeholders include:
 - < States and tribes
 - < Local jurisdictions
 - < Community members (public)
 - < Environmental justice (EJ) and community-based organizations
 - < Non-governmental organizations (NGO)
 - < Industry and local businesses
 - < Academia—Public school systems and universities
- ***Options for the Structure of the New Border XXI Program***
 - < Continue with current structure
 - < Modify current structure
 - < Implement a regional approach
 - < Others
- ***Time frame***
 - < Border roundtable meetings to be held from August 2000 through March 2001

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- < Briefing of the incoming administration from December 2000 through May 2001
- < Public meetings to be held in Fall 2001 before the New Border XXI Plan is drafted to receive stakeholder input for the plan
- < Preparation of the Draft Border XXI Program Plan beginning in Winter 2001
- < Solicitation of comments on the Draft Plan
- < Finalization and implementation of the New Border XXI Program Plan

GROUP DISCUSSION

A group discussion followed the opening presentation to solicit input from local community stakeholders regarding current border environmental issues and the new border program plan. This section summarizes the comments made by stakeholders during the discussion period. As a result of comments and suggestions received during the first three roundtable meetings held in Laredo, Edinburg, and Brownsville, Texas, the last three discussion questions were revised.

What are the most critical binational border environmental and human health issues in this area? (i.e., what issues will require U.S. and Mexican collaboration and cooperation to address?)

- Sustainable management of resources
- Sustainable development in response to increased population
- Energy issues
- Transportation issues
- Hazardous waste management, disposal and transportation
 - < Emergency response in Mexico
 - < Radioactive waste disposal and transportation
 - < Funding
 - < Mutual aid agreement

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- < Preparedness for catastrophic events
- Water issues
 - < Conservation
 - < Remediation and restoration of Rio Grande
 - < Sharing of water resources data
- Air quality
 - < Need for improvement of air quality emissions inventory
 - < Indoor air quality
- Environmental health issues
 - < Pesticide exposure
 - < Food safety
 - < Neural tube defects
 - < Child health care
 - < Communicable diseases
 - < Respiratory diseases
 - < Sanitation
- Illegal dumping
- Appropriate innovative technologies

Who should be part of an effort to identify and prioritize the most critical environmental and human health issues in this area?

- Land owners

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- Citizens
- Community groups
- Land users
- Environmental health professionals
- Industry
- Municipalities

Would you like to participate or carry out binational environmental and human health efforts? Is so, how would you like to participate? If not, what would make you more interested in participating?

Information and data sharing could be improved (for example, better dissemination of study data and findings)

- Community representatives should be included in decision-making meetings. Projects should be community-driven with state and federal entities serving as resources for the community. Community members and grassroots organizations should have access to decision-makers. Also, funding should be available to reimburse community groups and concerned citizens for travel, training workshops and seminar fees, etc.
- Development of a more geographically-based program structure. The responsibilities of each agency should be determined for a particular geographic area. Agencies should be grouped by media, such as air, water, etc. Each focused group should meet to discuss a particular local issue and should include local organization participants and community members.
- More community outreach is needed.

In this area of the border, what types of binational efforts have worked? What has made them successful? What efforts have not worked and why?

- Successes
 - < Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition
 - < Focus building networks between the U.S. and Mexico for outreach, partnership, and parity

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- < Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)—through advanced training, information resources, outreach, and follow-up in communities.
- < Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)—successful in project to increase use of oxygenated gasoline to reduce carbon monoxide
- < Paso del Norte Water Quality Task Force—have developed priority projects via meetings
- < TNRCC working with maquiladoras to develop pollution prevention waste plans

What must the next binational border programs include to be successful?

- < Include non-profit organizations, local governments, and community residents
- < Gather information resources from both the U.S. and Mexico
- < Greater cooperation in the transfer and sharing of data
- < Implementation of projects that benefit both sides of the border
- < Healthy sister city plans
- < Educate local media

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, meeting participants were encouraged to contact EPA and TNRCC directly with additional comments and suggestions. They were also advised that information, comments, and suggestions presented at the roundtable discussion would be incorporated into an option format that will be used to develop the next border program plan. A draft plan is expected in January 2002.